

# Village Board decides on larger parking deck as part of Hinsdale Middle School construction



A rendering of the new Hinsdale Middle School. (Cordogan Clark & Associates)

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**T**he [Hinsdale](#) Village Board has decided on a nearly 200-space parking deck to be built in conjunction with the new Hinsdale Middle School. Village officials have a choice of building a 189-space deck for an estimated \$4.53 million or 118 spaces for an estimated \$2.78 million on the lower level of the two-level parking garage planned by Hinsdale-[Clarendon Hills](#) Elementary School District 181. It will be built to the north of the new middle school, at 100 S. Garfield St.

The middle school will use the 124 or so spaces on the first level of the garage for its staff and visitors. Those spaces will be available for general use when the school is closed.

From the exterior, the parking garage would look the same, regardless of whether 189 or 118 spaces are built.

Village manager Kathleen Gargano and Public Safety Director Bradley Bloom both said the smaller garage would be adequate, but business owners disagreed.

Lop Chin, who has owned the Jade Dragon restaurant, at 43 S. Washington St., for 22 years, said parking has always been an issue.

He believes officials may underestimate how much business is lost because customers do not want to come to the downtown where they know it will be difficult to find a parking space.

He has friends who work in buildings near Ogden Avenue and York Road.

"They used to come into town for lunch. They don't come to town anymore," Chin said.

Chin, who also lives in Hinsdale, said his neighbors and even his wife do not come into town because of the parking problems.

He used to have four waiters working at the same time, now he has one, he said. The fall-off in his business occurred before all the new restaurants opened in town, he said.

Those potential customers had given up before the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning analyzed the parking situation in Hinsdale in 2014.

"All those people are gone already," Chin said. "They are long gone."

The planning agency reported the busiest time was between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. on weekdays, when all the available spaces in the downtown area were full. It would be ideal to reduce the occupancy rate to 85 percent, which would require about 70 more spaces, the report concluded.

The village also hired a traffic engineer to review the parking needs and future demand if tenants move into buildings that are vacant, such as the former Gap store on the southeast corner of First and Washington streets, and 36 E. Hinsdale, which used to house a toy store and a Verizon store.

If those buildings are occupied, between 42 and 72 more spaces would be needed, depending on whether stores or restaurants occupy them, the traffic engineer reported. Therefore, according to the experts, the village needs from 113 to 142 more spaces, so that only 85 percent are full during the 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. peak time.

"One of the biggest problems with these numbers is they are based on a flawed system," said John Karstrand, who chairs the village's Economic Development Commission. "We don't know what the demand is. We don't know how many people come to town, drive around and leave."

Bill Merchantz, who owns the three-story commercial building at 111 S. Lincoln St., said the planning agency study focused on providing enough parking for the stores and restaurants, but overlooked people going to all the other businesses in the downtown, such as orthodontists, lawyers, spas, hair salons and even the School of Rock.

"They've made investments in these buildings," Merchantz said. "Somebody has to speak up for them."

Village officials, including Bloom, acknowledge they have no way to measure how many more people would patronize the downtown businesses if they could find a convenient parking space.

The exact size aside, Gargano said, there is no better time and better place to build the parking deck.

The village likely would issue bonds to pay for its portion of the parking garage. The staff estimates the 189-space deck would cost about \$320,000 in bond and interest payments, compared to \$200,000 for the smaller garage.

That difference of \$120,000 a year was a significant factor in their deliberation, said Village President Thomas Cauley, Jr., and Village Trustee Jerry Hughes. But Hughes said he believes the numbers support the larger garage.

Village officials also consulted with the Hinsdale Chamber of Commerce.

"We are wholly in support of the larger garage," said Jan Anderson, the Chamber president. "From the get go, we encouraged the village to take full advantage and build the 189-space deck."

The Chamber office is located on First Street in the downtown, so the staff sees firsthand how difficult parking is, Anderson said. Adding more parking is key for the downtown to remain vital, she said.

A lack of sufficient parking also may have caused some companies and entrepreneurs to decide not to open a business in Hinsdale, Anderson said.

For Trustee Laura LaPlaca, there was no doubt the village should build the larger deck.

"I have heard nothing but people saying, you are crazy if you don't build the larger garage," LaPlaca said.

Cauley, too, decided the larger garage was the best choice.

"I have heard it loud and clear from the community," he said.

If customers' vehicles do not consistently fill the parking deck, some of the spaces could be rented to commuters. About 70 people are on a waiting list for a permitted parking space near the downtown train station, Bradley said.

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